

INSTITUTE BOOKLETS: 8

THE ESSENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE

By

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

ब्रजकिशोरी नन्दाजी

उप-म-जी

हिन्दी परिषद्

परास्नातक हिन्दी विभाग,

कश्मीर मण्डल, जम्मू तथा कश्मीर विश्वविद्यालय
श्रीनगर, कश्मीर।



THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
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A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ranganathananda is Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. This book reproduces a lecture he gave at the Institute in December 1964, which was published in the February 1965 issue of the Institute's BULLETIN. Earlier, it also formed the theme of a lecture he gave to a distinguished audience at the India International Centre, New Delhi, in September 1963.

THE ESSENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE

THE SUBJECT of Indian culture is a theme difficult to expound in the course of a short talk. The long history of this culture, its different expressions, and its rich variety make it difficult to deal with it in the course of a few minutes. The subject is interesting for a special reason. Every ancient culture holds some interest for all of us ; but when the culture is a continuing culture, that interest becomes much more contemporary, much more topical. In the case of the study of ancient cultures like the Babylonian or the Egyptian, or even the ancient Greek, we study them more from a historical point of view, just to enrich ourselves from the experiences of the past. But the study of Indian culture is of special significance to us, because it is still a living factor in the life of nearly one-seventh of the human race. How this culture arose nearly five thousand years ago, how it devel-

oped and was enriched in subsequent centuries, and, finally, how it has come down to us as a rich human legacy is therefore a very fascinating and rewarding study.

INDIAN CULTURE: A HISTORIC PANORAMA

'Nothing should more deeply shame the modern student', says Will Durant, 'than the recency and inadequacy of his acquaintance with India. Here is a vast peninsula of nearly two million square miles; two-thirds as large as the United States, and twenty times the size of its master, Great Britain; 320,000,000 souls—more than in all North and South America combined, or one-fifth of the population of the earth; an impressive continuity of development and civilization from Mohenjo-daro, 2900 B.C. or earlier, to Gandhi, Raman, and Tagore; faiths compassing every stage from barbarous idolatry to the most subtle and spiritual pantheism; philosophers playing a thousand variations on one monistic theme from the Upaniṣads, eight centuries before Christ, to Śaṅkara, eight centuries after him; scientists developing astronomy three thousand years ago, and winning Nobel

prizes in our own time ; a democratic constitution of untraceable antiquity in the villages, and wise and beneficent rulers like Aśoka and Akbar in the capitals ; minstrels singing great epics almost as old as Homer, and poets holding world audiences today ; artists raising gigantic temples for Hindu gods from Tibet to Ceylon and from Cambodia to Java, or carving perfect palaces by the score for Mogul kings and queens—this is the India that patient scholarship is now opening up, like a new intellectual continent, to that Western mind which only yesterday thought civilization an exclusively European thing' (*The Story of Civilization*, Vol. I: *Our Oriental Heritage*, p. 391, opening paragraph of the section on India).

The UNESCO-sponsored book *Traditional Cultures in South-East Asia*, published by Orient Longmans, gives the following definition of culture:

'Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values, and social forms which are passed on from one generation to another in any given society' (quoted in

the article on 'The Future for Traditional Cultures' by Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri in the *Unesco Chronicle* for May 1959).

The subject of culture is generally divided into two categories, namely, material and mental. We can study Indian culture from these two aspects. All early developments of a culture relate to its development in its material aspect. So far as India is concerned, we are not able to tell where, or at what date, this culture started. Dating in Indian history, especially as we go back, becomes extremely difficult ; but from the data gathered patiently by historians and research workers, we have come to know that, when the Indian people first appear on the horizon of history, they have already acquired a developed form of material culture. The *Rg-Veda*, their first written record, and which is also the first written record of mankind, gives us the picture of a people who have already settled down to a life of agriculture, village handicrafts, and village organization, and who exhibit a good deal of the love of life, of poetry, and of war.

So, to deal with the material culture of these people in its early beginnings is rather difficult. Going back further still, if we accept the viewpoint of several eminent historians that the Indus Valley civilization is pre-R̥g-Vedic, even so, that civilization also appears on the horizon in its developed form as a highly sophisticated urban culture. Thus it is extremely difficult to deal with the earliest beginnings of Indian culture. But one thing strikes us, and it is this: when this culture makes it début on the stage of human history, it discloses a state of social evolution long past the primitive stage, and poised for a mighty advance on the plane of mind and thought. For the R̥g-Vedic Indians, whom historians call Indo-Aryans, were an energetic race of people; they were deeply religious; and they had leisure. These conditions led them to invest their surplus energies on the plane of mind.

We know from the science of anthropology that, when a group achieves a measure of stability and security in the material base of its culture through settled agriculture and industry, thus allowing for a certain

amount of leisure, it tends to invest this surplus leisure in the higher plane of man's inner life, thus giving rise to the second aspect of its culture, namely, mental culture. In the *R̥g-Veda*, we are already face to face with this emergence of the life of mind, the life of thought, not merely in the field of literature, but also in the field of bold philosophical speculation, asking questions about the nature of the universe and the meaning of human existence. Starting very early in the life of the Indian people in the *R̥g-Vedic* period, this philosophic temper and inward bias was to grow in range and volume in later centuries so as to become eventually the dominant characteristic of Indian culture.

THE VEDIC WELTANSCHAUUNG

The vast and varied Vedic literature gives us an insight into the mind and mood of India of those days. The thoughts and insights gained by the gifted minds of the Vedic period became the foundation and the stimulus of all later developments of culture and thought in India. They have

bequeathed a *Weltanschauung* which has sustained India for centuries, and which is dynamic even today.

To understand Indian culture, we have to get an insight into this *Weltanschauung*. Every culture and civilization has behind it the inspiration of a philosophy. The understanding of that philosophy is necessary for the comprehension of the mind and mood and processes of its culture or civilization. 'A civilization without a philosophy', says Hegel, 'is like a temple without the holy of holies.'

Indian culture in its long career has experimented with life in its diverse aspects and levels. It has not neglected any of the values of life, but it has concentrated more on some than on others. Politics, economics, art, science, religion, and philosophy—all these have been enriched by its contributions; but its greatest and most unique contribution is in the field of religion and philosophy. To treat Indian culture and outlook as other-worldly, as some western writers have done, is thus not true to fact. Other-worldliness, transcendentalism, is undoubtedly its characteristic feature; but at

the base of this transcendentalism is a robust positivism with zest in life, and its expression in art, literature, music, and dance.

'The Hindus no less than the Greeks', says Dr. Brajendranath Seal, 'have shared in the work of constructing scientific concepts and methods in the investigation of physical phenomena, as well as of building up a body of positive knowledge which has been applied to industrial technique ; and Hindu scientific ideas and methodology (e.g. the inductive method or methods of algebraic analysis) have deeply influenced the course of natural philosophy in Asia—in the East as well as the West—in China and Japan, as well as in the Saracen Empire' (*The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*, 1915, Foreward, p. IV).

India has been known to other nations as a land of wealth and philosophic wisdom ; both trade with India and communion with her mind and thought were much sought after. These facts go to show that the people of ancient India took keen interest in man as a member of society, man struggling to overcome external obstacles, man

seeking delight in social and personal existence. This is an aspect of culture which we find prominent in the India of the *R̥g-Veda*, and which, though relegated to second place in later ages in the wake of new thought developments, was never treated as a value of no consequence in any period of its long history.

THE MIND AND MOOD OF THE INDO-ARYANS

The picture of the Indo-Aryan creators of this culture depicted by the *R̥g-Veda* reveals to us a race of sturdy people bubbling with youthfulness and vivacity, energy and zest. They were endowed with love of life, capacity for work, and a gift for poetry, and, later, for philosophy as well. There is no touch of pessimism in the atmosphere of the *R̥g-Veda*. Transcendental elements are undoubtedly there, yet there is no indication of hankering or passion for anything transcendental, except a keen desire to go to heaven after death ; but this heaven is but an idealized form of the sensuous life on earth, and a welcome change from the

humdrum life here below. The R̥g-Vedic Indians were frankly worldly, and they were not apologetic about it. In this, they bear close kinship to people who belong to our contemporary civilization. Both are positivists, who bend even religion to positivistic purposes.

But the Indo-Aryans were not content to live at the level of their bodies. Their dynamic and restless minds could not long remain content with an easy and pleasant life. With stability achieved at the material and social level, their mental life began to experience deep stirrings and questionings, which slowly led them to question their erstwhile philosophy of facile optimism, and to forge ahead to wider horizons of thought and deeper levels of experience. Towards the end of the Vedic period, Indian history entered its most creative period through the Upaniṣads, which, so far as the whole subsequent history of India is concerned, is also the most decisive and pervasive. In the Upaniṣads, we see the mental life of man reaching the summit and surveying from that height the whole field of experience below.

THE PHILOSOPHIC LEGACY OF THE INDO-ARYANS

This spirit of inquiry which possessed the Indo-Aryan mind led them to question experience, to question the environing world, to question their gods and the tenets of their traditional faiths; they did not fear to doubt when rational, certain knowledge was hard to come by. They illustrate the truth of the creative role of scepticism; in the pursuit of truth, such scepticism is but the prelude to rational faith. When they sought for the truth of the external universe, they found it baffling; inquiry only deepened the mystery. The *Nāsadīya-sūkta* of the *Ṛg-Veda* records the impact of this mystery on the Indo-Aryan mind. That mind discovered early, as modern thinkers are slowly discovering today, that the mystery of the external world will only deepen and not diminish, in spite of advancing knowledge, if the mystery of the inner world is not tackled. For a complete philosophy of reality, there is need to have the data from both the fields of experience, the outer and the inner.

In constructing a philosophy of external nature, we rely on the data supplied by the senses ; we start with these data, but very soon we are compelled to go beyond them on the wings of speculation. Early Indian speculations in the field of cosmology are bold and daring, and they bear close kinship with the cosmological speculations of modern scientific thought. Early Indian scientists, like the modern scientists, posited a self-evolving cause behind the entire universe. An important corollary of this is what Indian thinkers refer to as the non-difference between cause and effect ; effect is only cause in another form ; the effect is the gross form of which the subtle form is the cause. All things and events in nature, including man, are subject to this cause and effect process. Nothing happens arbitrarily or haphazardly. By rational, objective investigation, man can unravel the cause or causes of events, and gain control over nature's processes.

A second point of close kinship between the two is the concept of evolution. The Indo-Aryans advanced the theory of the universe being the product of an evolution-

ary process, and not the creation of an extracosmic deity. They believed in cosmic as well as organic evolution. The universe is not static, but dynamic ; cosmic energy passes from the undifferentiated to the differentiated state. Their concept of nature was far more comprehensive than even that of modern science. It included not only the physical and biological, but also the mental and spiritual aspects of the universe of experience.

A third point of kinship is that there is no place for the supernatural in Indian thought. The conflict between mind and matter, and that between natural and supernatural, so characteristic of modern western thought, are unknown to Indian thought. Fourthly, the modern theories of the conservation of energy and the unity of matter and energy, which are revolutionary discoveries in modern thought, are integral parts of Indian philosophical thought. And, fifthly, the vastness of cosmic time and space as well as the relativity of both is another important point of contact between ancient Indian thought and modern scientific thought.

These few examples are enough to show the rational bent and speculative daring of these early Indian thinkers. In the Upaniṣads, we get a glimpse of the workings of their minds. They were unhampered by the tyranny of religious dogma or political authority, or even the pressure of public opinion. They sought truth with a single-minded devotion, rare in the history of thought. In the words of Max Müller:

‘It is surely astounding that such a system as the Vedānta should have been slowly elaborated by the indefatigable and intrepid thinkers of India thousands of years ago, a system that even now makes us feel giddy, as in mounting the last steps of the swaying spire of an ancient Gothic cathedral. None of our philosophers, not excepting Heraclitus, Plato, Kant, or Hegel, has ventured to erect such a spire, never frightened by storms or lightnings. Stone follows on stone after regular succession after once the first step has been made, after once it has been clearly seen that in the beginning there can have been but One, as there will be but One in the end,

whether we call it Ātman or Brahman' (*Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 182).

THE UPANISADS AND MODERN SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT

In the Upaniṣads, we can study the graceful conflict of thought with thought, the emergence of more satisfactory thought, and the rejection of the less adequate ideas without a tear. Hypotheses are advanced and rejected on the touchstone of experience and not at the dictate of a creed. Thus thought forges ahead to unravel the mystery of the world in which we live. Only a small minority of thinkers participated in this great adventure; they were gifted with a deep passion for truth and for the happiness and welfare of humanity. It is no wonder that what they achieved in the speculative field can stand comparison with the advanced scientific cosmology of the modern age.

But these Indian thinkers were not satisfied with their intellectual speculations. They discovered, as the modern scientists are discovering today, that, in spite of such speculative knowledge, the universe

remained a mystery, and that the mystery only deepened with the advance of such knowledge. One of the important components of that deepening mystery of the universe is the mystery of man himself. The Upaniṣads became aware of this truth ; this is also the central truth emphasized in twentieth-century physical science. To both, man is the greatest mystery—holding the key to all other mysteries.

With the dawning of this awareness, philosophy took a new and revolutionary turn in ancient India ; from being speculative, it became experiential. The external universe comes into the field of experience only in its observable aspects ; this is only a fraction of the total reality ; beyond it lies the infinite expanse of the unobservable. Twentieth-century physical science is concerned only with this observable aspect of the universe ; but it has become aware that the data of this observable universe includes also the ever-present datum of the observer. Modern science does try to peep into the unobservable on the basis of the observable. But all such

attempts are speculative ventures which make the mystery more incomprehensible. In the words of Sir James Jeans:

‘Physical science set out to study a world of matter and radiation, and finds that it cannot describe or picture the nature of either, even to itself. Photons, electrons, and protons have become as meaningless to the physicist as x , y , z are to a child on its first day of learning algebra. The most we hope for at the moment is to discover ways of manipulating x, y, z without knowing what they are, with the result that the advance of knowledge is at present reduced to what Einstein has described as extracting one incomprehensible from another incomprehensible’ (*The New Background of Science*, p. 68).

What is the significance of the presence of this datum of the observer in the data of the observed and observable? It seems to hide a profounder mystery than the external universe, both from the theoretical and the practical points of view. If the self is inextricably involved in the awareness of the not-self, an inquiry into the nature of the self becomes not only a valid,

but also an indispensable scientific inquiry. If the mind as knower is involved in our knowledge of the external world, an inquiry into the nature of the mind and the nature of knowledge becomes an integral part of the scientific investigation into the nature of reality. As remarked by Sir Arthur Eddington:

‘We have discovered that it is actually an aid in the search for knowledge to understand the nature of the knowledge which we seek’ (*Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 5).

‘In the evolution of scientific thought,’ says Lincoln Barnett, ‘one fact has become impressively clear: there is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself. All highroads of the intellect, all byways of theory and conjecture lead ultimately to an abyss that human ingenuity can never span. For man is enchained by the very condition of his being, his finiteness and involvement in nature. The farther he extends his horizons, the more vividly he recognizes the fact that, as the physicist Niels Bohr puts it, “we are both spectators and actors

in the great drama of existence". Man is thus his own greatest mystery. He does not understand the vast veiled universe into which he has been cast for the reason that he does not understand himself. He comprehends but little of his organic processes and even less of his unique capacity to perceive the world about him, to reason and to dream. Least of all does he understand his noblest and most mysterious faculty: the ability to transcend himself and perceive himself in the act of perception' (*The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, pp. 126-27).

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MYSTERY OF MAN

From these and other considerations advanced by eminent scientists, it is clear that modern physical science in its theoretical aspect is face to face with this tremendous mystery of the self of man. The same situation obtains in the modern biological sciences also. Evolution today is conceived as a universal phenomenon. Nature reveals a movement from an undifferentiated energy mass into a differentiated cosmos; cosmic evolution rises to the

organic level, which again rises to the human level. What is it that is disclosed by this tremendous fact of evolution? In the nineteenth century, this subject was not discussed very deeply. That century is notable for establishing the *fact* of evolution; and this is achieved against much opposition from an entrenched mass of theological dogma and prejudice. During the hundred and odd years since the publication of Darwin's monumental works *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, biology has made great strides, especially in the study of the *course* of evolution and, to a lesser extent, of the *significance* of evolution.

These advances since Darwin formed the theme of the discussions at a conference of leading scientists, held under the auspices of the Chicago University in November 1959, to commemorate the centenary of the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. The proceedings of this conference, available in three volumes under the general title *Evolution after Darwin*, acquaint us with these revolutionary advances, which have a bearing on the

nature of reality and the destiny of man. Writing in the opening article of volume one on 'The Emergence of Darwinism', Sir Julian Huxley tells us that, at the time when Darwin's books were published, 'the main need was to establish on a firm basis the *fact* of evolution and its scientific comprehensibility. In recent years, however, we have turned our attention to the *course* of evolution ; and as a result, have been enabled to reach a number of important conclusions about the evolutionary process in general, and our own place and role within it in particular' (*Evolution after Darwin*, The University of Chicago Centennial, Vol. I, *The Evolution of Life*, p. 17).

Sir Julian Huxley further tells us that, in its progress from the inorganic to the organic or biological stage, evolution achieved novel features of great significance:

'The great novelty of the biological phase was the emergence of awareness—psychological or mental capacities—to a position of increasing biological importance.

‘Eventually, in the line leading to man, the organization of awareness reached a level at which experience could be not only stored in the individual, but transmitted cumulatively to later generations. This second critical point initiated the human or psycho-social phase of evolution. ...

‘In broadest terms, the biological phase of evolution stems from the new invention of self-reproducing matter; the human phase, from that of self-reproducing mind’ (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Pointing to the theoretical and practical significance of this human phase, Huxley says:

‘In the light of these new facts and ideas, man’s true destiny emerges in startling new form. It is to be the chief agent for the future of evolution on this planet. Only in and through man can any further major advance be achieved—though equally he may inflict damage or distortion on the process, including his own evolving self’ (*ibid.*).

Discussing the aim of human evolution as ‘greater fulfilment’, Huxley continues:

‘In the light of our present knowledge,

man's most comprehensive aim is seen not as mere survival, not as numerical increase, not as increased complexity of organization or increased control over his environment, but as greater fulfilment—the fuller realization of more possibilities by the human species collectively and more of its component members individually' (*ibid.*, p. 20).

And pleading for a scientific study of the scope of this concept of fulfilment, Huxley concludes:

'Once greater fulfilment is recognized as man's ultimate or dominant aim, we shall need a science of human possibilities to help guide the long course of psycho-social evolution that lies ahead' (*ibid.*, p. 21).

MAN: THE CENTRAL MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

Thus from the side of both the sciences, of matter and of life, man becomes the central mystery of the universe. Through one of the fruits of her own evolution, namely, man, nature has disclosed the outlines of the deep mystery that lies in her depths. Herein lies man's uniqueness both as an item of evolution and as the key to the

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mystery of nature. Hence the importance of developing what Huxley calls 'a science of human possibilities'. It was such a science, the science of religion, which India sought and found in her Upaniṣads, and which she integrated with the sciences of matter and life to emerge as the unifying philosophy of the Vedānta.

When we speak of any culture, we have to ask one important question: What is the concept of man in that culture? Among the various cultures that have come down to us, we have two broad divisions: one, the Greek or the Greco-Roman, and the other, the Indian. In each of these two cultures, we see a distinctive view of man and his highest excellence. The concept of man and his excellence can serve as a good measuring rod to assess the culture of a people. Apart from the material bases of a culture, which are generally common in almost every developed culture of the past—a certain measure of economic and social security through settled agriculture, simple handicrafts, and effective social organization—the most important determinant of a culture is the direction of its

mental life, the questions it asks of experience and the answers it receives. These stirrings in the mind of man signify the beginnings of a conscious and deliberate control and guidance of life's forces. This new trend in evolution could not have proceeded far, had man been subject to the pressures of nature in his external life. If he had had to fight for his very existence, like the rest of the animal creation, he would not have developed even the desire, much less the capacity, to scale the heights of evolution on his own. Herein is the significance of his achievement of the rudiments of material culture. He can now advance evolution into the higher field of mind and thought ; this is the special field of human evolution, where quality replaces quantity as the central criterion of progress. In this, he receives help from his unique capacity for speech and the transmission of accumulated experience. He is thus endowed with a cultural inheritance over and above his genetic inheritance. With the aid of these, the mental component of culture advances from generation to generation. Says Julian Huxley:

'Man is therefore of immense significance. . . . Here is a reminder of the existence, here and there, in the quantitative vastness of cosmic matter and its energy equivalents, of a trend toward mind, with its accompaniment of quality and richness of existence—and, what is more, a proof of the importance of mind and quality in the all-embracing evolutionary process' (Lecture on 'The Evolutionary Vision', *ibid.*, Vol. III, *Issues in Evolution*, p. 252).

It was this advance of evolution into the higher fields of mind and awareness, and into what Huxley terms 'the science of human possibilities', that took place in the India of the Upaniṣads. The fruits of that advance have an undying quality about them; they have nourished India for ages; and they have already proved their appeal for man in the modern age as well.

The practical urgency for tackling the subject of the mystery of man today has been hinted at by Huxley in the passage referred to earlier. That urgency arises from the fact that, with the enormous powers that modern technology has placed in his hands, man becomes for the first time the

agent of evolutionary advance or the only possible destroyer of his civilization and of the rest of nature. Man creates a world-wide civilization ; he willy-nilly destroys it. Does not this tragic paradox highlight the mystery that is man and the need to discover the creative possibilities lying deep within him, and to evolve the techniques capable of educating him into becoming the fairest flower of evolution and the saviour of his undoubtedly rich civilization ? ' We are in the middle of a race ', says Bertrand Russell, ' between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends. . . . Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow ' (*The Impact of Science on Society*, pp. 120-21).

Scientists like Eddington have posed certain questions wherein this mystery stands sharpened in the context of the total mystery of the universe.

In a BBC broadcast some decades ago, Eddington posed this question: ' What is the truth about ourselves ? ' and proceeded to answer: ' We are a bit of star gone wrong. ' That is the first answer from the

purely astrophysical point of view. Again, answering in terms of nineteenth-century physics, he said: 'We are a bit of machinery, puppets that strut and talk and laugh till time turns the handle beneath.' We are like machines, wound up and wound down by inexorable time.

But these two answers did not satisfy Eddington. So he finally added: 'But there is one elementary inescapable answer: We are that which asks the question.' Here is thrown a profound hint. We are the subject; we are the self; we cannot be equated with mere objects. We have a profound dimension within us, which refuses to be reduced to physical or mechanical or merely objective categories. Modern Existentialist philosophy registers this protest of the human self against the total mechanistic philosophy of nineteenth-century science.

The modern age is witnessing a growing urge in man everywhere to realize his true self; he is keenly feeling the need to make his knowledge flower into wisdom; he is experiencing a nameless hunger for the infinite and the eternal; he is in search of

the universal dimension of his personality, from where he can send out tendrils of love, waves of what sociologist Sorokin terms altruism, to his fellow-beings. It is against this background of modern thought and aspiration that the contributions of the Upaniṣads to Indian culture in particular, and to the human cultural legacy in general, become significant.

THE CHARM OF THE UPANISADS

The Upaniṣads, as we have seen, reveal an age characterized by a remarkable ferment of thought and inspiration. The physical and mental climate which made possible this ferment is an interesting study. Economically, there was no pressing problem weighing on the mind of man in the India of that age. The country was vast ; the population was very small. There was plenty of well-watered, fertile land available. There was unlimited economic opportunity for everyone. Much of India was then covered with forests. Even several centuries later, at the time of Buddha in ~~the~~ middle of the first millennium before Christ, the population of northern India

has been estimated by some authorities like Rhys Davids to have been only between 15 and 20 millions. The vastness of the country, the fertility of its soil, copious rainfall, rolling pasture lands, and the sparseness of the population—all these betoken the presence of stable economic conditions; none need be poor except he who is lazy or physically handicapped.

The Indian peasants and artisans were noted for their virtues of hard work and simple habits. We do not hear much about poverty in those days. Poverty appeared in India much later due, firstly, to foreign invasions accompanied by looting of national wealth on a large scale, and secondly, to insecurity arising from the first. The Indian village organization, which originated from the early Indo-Aryans, has come down to our own times standing the test of the vicissitudes of millennia of history. The entire social *milieu* of the Indo-Aryans was ripe with great potentialities; for that society had found leisure to think and to ask questions. The Indo-Aryans had the choice to utilize the leisure either to conquer the outer world or the inner. With their un-

doubted mental gifts, they could have bent their mental energies to the conquest of the world of matter and the enjoyment of its fruits. The ideological expansion of such a culture generally results in an aggressive lateral movement, political and economic, and often military. This is the normal way of all cultures rising from the material to the mental level. The products of such mental culture are the physical sciences, technology, economics, history, politics, literature, the arts, logic, grammar, speculative philosophy, conventional religion, and imperial expansion through war. The theme of this mental culture is *man in society*, his growth and expansion in the world of space and time. It aims at continuous refinement of his life at the sensate level. This is illustrated not only in the history of Greco-Roman culture, but in the Chinese, the ancient middle eastern, and the modern western cultures as well.

THE UPANISADS AND INDIAN CULTURE

This normal development is found happening in the case of Indian culture also. But very early in its career, it became aware

of a strange new field of human experience, namely, the *within* of nature as revealed in man, as revealed in his consciousness and ego sense. Even in the *R̥g-Veda*, we find the Indian mind experiencing intimations of something divine and immortal within itself. It gathered volume and power as years rolled on until, in the Upaniṣads, it became a flood issuing in a systematic, detached, and scientific pursuit of truth in the depth of experience. The Upaniṣads convey to us an impression of the tremendous fascination that this new field of inquiry held for the contemporary Indian mind ; and that fascination has continued to hold India's mind in thrall even to this day.

The Upāṇiṣads gave a permanent orientation to the incipient Indo-Aryan culture by their emphasis on inner penetration, by their whole-hearted advocacy of what the Greeks centuries later formulated in the dictum 'man, know thyself', but at which they themselves stopped half-way. All subsequent developments of Indian culture were powerfully conditioned by this Upaniṣadic legacy. This stress on inward depth had one supreme consequence

for Indian culture, in that all its expansive outward movements throughout history were non-aggressive; every word of its message for man 'has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it', as remarked by Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 106).

The essence of a culture is revealed in the type of man in whom that culture finds its own highest excellence manifested. A culture is worldly, if worldly success is what its most admired hero represents. If there is any truth in calling Indian culture spiritual, it derives from the fact that the most admired hero of the Indian people has been, and is, the man of God. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

'The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit, who has attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she has clung fast to this ideal and produced in every generation and in every part of

the country, from the time of the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully to realize this ideal' (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp. 381-82).

As the Greeks and the others specialized in the subject of man in society, India specialized in man in depth, man as the individual. Each has its glory and grandeur ; each has its limitations, which exactly render one the complement of the other. Dealing with this special bent of the Indian mind in his lecture on 'The Powers of the Mind', Swami Vivekananda says:

'This is the peculiarity of the Indian mind that, when anything interests it, it gets absorbed in it and other things are neglected. You know how many sciences had their origin in India. Mathematics began there. You are even today counting 1,2,3, etc., to zero, after Sanskrit figures, and you all know that Algebra also originated in India, and that gravitation was known to the Indians thousands of years before Newton was born. . . . At a certain period of Indian history, this one subject of man and his mind absorbed all their interest.

And it was so enticing, because it seemed the easiest way to achieve their ends. Now, the Indian mind became so thoroughly persuaded that the mind could do anything and everything according to law that its powers became the great object of study. Charms, magic, and other powers, and all that were nothing extraordinary, but a regularly taught science, just as the physical sciences they had taught before that. Such a conviction in these things came up on the race that physical sciences nearly died out' (*Complete Works*, Vol. II, pp. 20-21).

INDIA VERSUS GREECE

It is here, therefore, in this Upaniṣadic legacy, that we have to seek for the essence of Indian culture. If the thought ferment of a period can become the determinant of all subsequent movements of a culture, the study of that thought ferment is the surest means to penetrate to the soul of that culture. We are familiar with an almost similar phenomenon in western history. In the fifth century before Christ, ancient Greece experienced a tremendous

thought ferment for a brief period, which became the most powerful determinant of the development of western civilization. To quote E. M. Forster:

'Greece hadn't science, it is true, and she had no global commitments, but she encompassed within the tiny circuit of her city states much that affects and afflicts the modern man in his relationship to society. And because her writers were intelligent and because they were sensitive, she has been able to send us news on these urgent matters which is still fresh, although it is over two thousand years old' (Preface to *The Greek View of Life* by Lowes Dickinson).

The concept of man in western culture is derived from the ancient Greek concept of man as essentially a member of a community. This is what one may call the *political* view of man. The *Rg-Veda* also upheld this concept and developed it not only to social, but also to cosmic proportions. There are similarities between the religious ideas of the Indo-Aryans of the *Rg-Veda* and the ancient Greeks. Both viewed religion from the political point of

view. It was non-creedal, integrative of the divine and human order, community-oriented, and frankly this-worldly. Out of this view of man have arisen all political and social struggles to improve the lot of man, and also aggressive wars and revolutions.

The Greek mind did not grow beyond this view of religion. Though the Greek mystery religions rise above the political level, they were not integrated with the distinctively Greek outlook and thought, being foreign to both; neither did the Greeks experience the urge to subject these mysteries to that rational investigation which they so diligently and passionately applied to social and political phenomena, and in which their contributions were to become unique and lasting.

What the ancient Greeks neglected became the one ruling passion of the Indo-Aryans in the Upaniṣads. The great sages of the Upaniṣads were concerned with man in his depth, with man above and beyond his political or social dimension. It was an inquiry which challenged not only life, but also death, and resulted in the discovery

of the immortal and divine Self of man, of which life and death are but shadows—
Yasya chāyā amṛtaṁ yasya mṛtyuh.

No philosophy can achieve depth without tackling the problem of death. This was one of the major drawbacks of Greek culture. In the words of Lowes Dickinson:

‘The more completely the Greek felt himself to be at home in the world, the more happily and freely he abandoned himself to the exercise of his powers, the more intensely and vividly he lived in action and in passion, the more alien, bitter, and incomprehensible did he find the phenomena of age and death. On this problem, so far as we can judge, he received from his religion but little light and still less consolation. The music of his brief life closed with a discord unresolved ; and even before reason had brought her criticism to bear upon his creed, its deficiency was forced upon him by his feeling’ (*ibid.*, p. 68).

MANLINESS VERSUS GODLINESS

The Upaniṣads have given us a body of insights which have the quality of the

universal about them. This universality derives from their impersonality. The sages who discovered them were rich and warm personalities who had depersonalized themselves in the search for truth. This explains the immortal quality of their philosophy and the immortal quality of the culture for which that philosophy stood sponsor.

Universality and humanism are two of the essential characteristics of Indian culture. Its concern is with man as such and not man cut up into caste, creed, sect, or race. The achievement by man of the highest glory and excellence is what it seeks. This glory and excellence is achieved by the increasing manifestation of man's spiritual potentialities through education ; he receives such education by the disciplines of socio-political life from outside, and by the disciplines of religion from inside. The first discipline enables man to attain the social excellence of citizenship, in which man becomes the creator and enjoyer of social values and delights. This is a concept of man which, as we have seen, was upheld in the *R̥g-Veda*, but was not much developed by later Indian

thought ; it was in ancient Greek thought that this concept found its legitimate development and expression. In fact, it became the sole preoccupation of the gifted Greek mind, which explains why the whole world is indebted to Greece for this unique contribution to human culture. Though this concept did not find adequate expression in India in the practical sphere of her culture due to specialization in another field, it yet finds an honoured place in her rational philosophy of man, the Vedānta, which recognizes in this human excellence a high manifestation of human spirituality. To struggle against and overcome thwarting obstacles, to establish a healthy environment, physical and social, in which man can rise to his highest social excellence, to enjoy the delights of culture and civilization—this is what constitutes the true manliness of man ; this is to view him in his promethean aspect.

While recognizing this glory and excellence of man, the Upaniṣads asked the question: Is there a glory higher still ? They discovered that the ideal of manliness

was an achievement within the sphere of nature, within the framework of relativity ; they wanted to go beyond such nature ; they sought to realize the transcendental dimension of man—the dimension of godliness over and above manliness. This is ever the province of religion, not religion as an adjunct of the socio-political, but as the wholly spiritual, in which human awareness goes beyond the body, the senses, and the environing world ; in which man realizes himself as the immortal Self, beyond finite time, space, and causality. The ancient Indian sages dared to take up this challenge ; and the Upaniṣads are the unique record of the methods they adopted, the struggles they undertook, and the victory they gained in this great adventure of the human spirit. And this is conveyed to us in passages possessed of great vigour and much poetic charm. In seeking for the immortal, the sages conferred immortality on the literature which conveyed it and the culture which embodied it.

THEIR SYNTHESIS IN THE GITA

Though Indian culture specialized in

one field, and comparatively neglected the other, Indian philosophy, the Vedānta, as stated earlier, did not fail to comprehend both in a sweeping synthesis. This is the *Sanātana Dharma*, Religion Eternal, in which the two values of manliness and saintliness are blended in a comprehensive spirituality, of which the most authentic voice is the *Gītā*. Coming in the wake of the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā* is the first successful attempt in man's cultural history to work out a complete philosophy of life, reconciling the secular and the sacred, work and worship. This central message of the *Gītā* is highlighted by Śaṅkara in the masterly introduction which he wrote to his commentary on this great book: *Dvividho hi vedokto dharmah pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivṛttilakṣaṇasca jagataḥ sthitikāraṇam ; prāṇināṃ sākṣāt abhyudayaniḥśreya-sahetuḥ*—'The religion taught in the Vedas is twofold, conducive to the stability and maintenance of the world ; one, of the nature of energetic action, and the other, of the nature of calm withdrawal ; its purpose is to ensure the true welfare of (all) beings, worldly as well as spiritual.'

THE PATH TO GODLINESS

Before such a synthesis could be achieved, there was need to penetrate the inner world to its depths. This is what the Upaniṣads did to such perfection, and gave to all humanity the greatest of all sciences—the science of the Self. India has ever since remained the torch-bearer in this field. The supreme technique in this field is meditation fortified by moral purity and passion for truth. It is the fruit of the Indian idea that religion is a matter of experience and not of dogma or creed. It is a technique which the Upaniṣads perfected, but whose hoary antiquity goes back to the Indus Valley culture, one of the legacies of which is a figure seated in the *yoga* pose of meditation. It was the technique used to perfection by Buddha in a later age ; it continued as the central technique of the science of religion in India throughout the ages ; and it received powerful endorsement and impetus in the modern age from the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

One of the Upaniṣads conveys the

methods and results of this technique in a cryptic verse:

*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ
Tasmāt parāñpaśyati nāntarātman ;
Kaścit dhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣat
Āvṛttacakṣuḥ amṛtatvamicchān—*

'The Self-existent Lord created the sense-organs (including the mind) with the defect of an out-going disposition ; therefore (man) perceives (things) outside, but not the Self within. A certain wise man, desirous of immortality, turned the senses (including the mind) inward and realized the inner Self' (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, IV.I).

By inner penetration, meditation helps man to leave behind the body, the senses, the ego, and all other not-self elements which, being nature's products, are subject to time, and perishable. He thus realizes his immortal divine Self, of the nature of infinite existence, infinite knowledge, and infinite bliss. The body and the senses and the ego are but the instruments of the immortal Self for the experience of the world of time and space. These constitute the aspects of man the known, in the depth of

which is the real man, man the unknown. The Upaniṣads are the great saga of this discovery. The sages were aware of the pioneering quality of their efforts and discovery, and its significance for all humanity. This awareness finds expression in the power of their utterances and the joy suffusing them.

INDIA AND THE LURE OF GODLINESS

This discovery of the divine in the heart of man had a powerful impact on the later developments of culture in India. The consequences of such a discovery cannot remain confined and isolated. For the first time, it opened up a new vast field of exploration, more alluring, more strenuous and risky, but more promising than the external world of space and time. And on the trail blazed by the great Upaniṣadic sages marched India, first one part, then another, until, in the wake of Buddha and his movement, the whole of India became possessed of the religious passion. It lured the gifted and the ordinary in the land to the attempt to scale this Everest of experience. This impressive procession of seek-

ers and devotees down the ages, who renounced everything worldly in their search for truth, constitutes the unique feature of Indian cultural history; it is a feature which has not left unaffected even her intellectuals of all types, including the atheists and agnostics. Even in this modern age, that impressive procession has carried in its powerful current the outstanding cultural leaders of the Indian people, men like Rammohun Roy and Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION OF INDIAN CULTURE

, That the ultimate reality of man and the universe is spiritual through and through, that it is one and non-dual, that it can be realized by man, that this realization is the goal of human life, and that this goal can be reached through different paths—these constitute the fundamental ideas which have inspired Indian life; these have provided a spiritual base and a spiritual direction to Indian culture, and shaped

the destiny of the Indian people. Says Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

'The destiny of the human race, as of the individual, depends on the direction of its life forces, the lights which guide it, and the laws that mould it' (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 2).

The Vedānta describes Brahman, the ultimate Reality, as Sat-Cit-Ānanda, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. If bliss is a constituent of the ultimate reality of the universe, it becomes a constituent of the universe as well. As expressed by the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II.7): *Raso vai saḥ; rasam hyevāyam labdhvā ānandī bhavati. Ko hyevānyāt kaḥ prānyāt yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt. Eṣa hyeva ānandayāti*—'He (Brahman) is verily delight. By obtaining this delight, man verily becomes blissful. Who indeed would breathe, who live, if in the space (of the heart) this bliss were not there? Indeed, it is He alone that is the source of bliss.'

THE AESTHETIC COMPONENT OF INDIAN CULTURE

The Vedānta thus viewed the world as a

product of the joy of God. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (II.ii.7-8) therefore sings:

*Yah sarvajñah sarvavit yasyaiṣa mahimā
bhuvī ;*

*Divye Brahmapure hyeṣa vyomni ātmā
pratiṣṭhitah.*

*Manomayah prāṇaśarīranetā pratiṣṭhito'-
nne hṛdayam sannidhāya ;*

*Tat vijñānena paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ
ānandarūpam amṛtam yat vibhāti—*

'He whose glory is (seen) in the universe, who knows everything, who understands everything—He, this Ātman, is established in the luminous space of the city of Brahman (the heart). He assumes forms of the mind, and leads the senses and the body. He dwells in the body, inside the heart. The wise ones, through realization, see Him everywhere—the one that shines as the blissful and the immortal.'

The world is *ānandarūpam amṛtam*, blissful and immortal, as the verse puts it. The *Īśā Upaniṣad* describes God as *kavi*, the poet or seer (verse 8). The universe is his poem coming in waves and rhythms. It is *saundaryalaharī*, waves of beauty, in

the words of Śaṅkarācārya. The image of God as Naṭarāja, the king of dancers, teaches us that the world is the product of the joyous dance of the supreme Deity.

These philosophical conceptions and religious realizations inspired and fostered the aesthetic mood and temper of the Indian people and the flowering of their artistic genius ; India's contributions in the fields of literature and the fine arts constitute one of the most enduring and fascinating elements in her total cultural legacy. There is nothing of the negatively ascetic about it, though it is largely inspired by the religious motive ; for that religious motive itself, as we have seen, was suffused with the values of beauty and joy.

TOLERANCE AND UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE

One of the important fruits of Indian philosophical thought was the broadening of the Indian religious outlook. The discovery of the spiritual unity of all existence, and the emphasis on spiritual realization as the goal of religion, fostered inter-religious harmony. India has the unique record of combining in her outlook

and behaviour deep religious faith and feeling with broad tolerance and the spirit of acceptance. This can flow only from a conception of God which is infinite and all-embracing. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

‘Toleration is the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite’ (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 317).

To do honour to an infinite God in an infinite way is to practise active toleration and fellowship. India received this universality of sympathy from her Vedic seers in one of their greatest pronouncements: *Ekaṁ sat; viprā bahudhā vadanti*—‘Truth is One; sages call it by various names’, which Swami Vivekananda considers the Magna Carta of Religion. In the wake of the Vedic seers came Kṛṣṇa and Buddha, Śaṅkara and Ramakrishna, and a host of lesser luminaries, with their powerful voices in support of freedom in religion and sanity in inter-human relations. Says Kṛṣṇa:

*Ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāmstathaiva
bhajāmyaham ;*

*Mamavartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pār-
tha sarvaśaḥ—*

‘Through whatever paths men come to Me, I receive them through those very paths; all paths, O Arjuna, eventually come to Me only’ (*Gītā*, IV.11).

As stated earlier, it was not merely the saints and sages, thinkers and philosophers who upheld this idea, but also the common people. This wholesome attitude was cultivated also by the political state. The most glorious example among a host of kings and emperors was Emperor Aśoka of the third century B.C., who spread this idea throughout his vast dominions through inspiring edicts inscribed on rocks and pillars. This idea of toleration as acceptance is of the essence of Indian culture. It is not dictated by political expediency or social policy. It is the fruit of its philosophy of reality, and forms an integral part of its *Weltanschauung*.

INDIA’S WELCOME TO CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS REFUGEES

One of the most glorious aspects of India’s cultural history relates to the treat-

ment that her states and peoples gave to the religious and racial groups which came to India as refugees. Persecuted in their own countries, with their temples destroyed and fellow-religionists massacred, the Jews of Palestine and the Zoroastrians of Iran sought shelter in India, attracted by her traditions of tolerance and hospitality. And they found their hopes and aspirations fulfilled; for India received them with love and respect, and has continued to cherish them and their faiths ever since. In his opening address at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, on 11 September 1893, Swami Vivekananda referred to this glorious chapter in Indian history, nay, in all human history, in these memorable words:

'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom

the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to a religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee" ' (*Complete Works*, Vol. I, pp. 3-4).

ASSIMILATION AND SYNTHESIS

A culture sponsored and nourished by such a broad and tolerant *Weltanschauung* cannot be rigid and exclusive. Neither racial nor socio-political considerations form the central motive force of this culture; that motive force is spiritual. It is these former that breed rigidity and in-

tolerance and lead to violence and war. The spiritual is always universal and human. Because of this universal motive, Indian religion did not develop an all-powerful church and an exclusive tradition for its protection and sustenance. History teaches us that the rigidity of cultures proceeds largely from the exclusiveness of their religious traditions and political ambitions; much of this exclusiveness is derived from the awareness of racial superiority. The spiritual motive proceeding from the awareness of the divine in the heart of man cuts across all racial, creedal, and socio-political divisions, and embraces man in his integral wholeness. The love that flowed from the hearts of Kṛṣṇa and Buddha, Śaṅkara and Ramakrishna, embraced humanity not in its segments, but in its totality.

Rigidity and exclusiveness are the source of perpetual inter-cultural conflicts. Rigid cultures behave with each other, in the words of Bertrand Russell, like billiard balls, whose only possible mutual relationship is collision. The resilience and adaptability of Indian culture has impart-

ed to it a genius for assimilation and synthesis, which has made for the continued enrichment of that culture, and for its impressive continuity, through periodic renewals, down the millennia of history. Cultural rigidity is the product of the logical view of you *or* I. India, on the other hand, chose the spiritual view of you *and* I. In this, she was inspired by her spiritual vision of the One *in* the many. The fruit of this vision in the cultural field was a peaceful policy and programme of unity in diversity, instead of an aggressive striving for dull, dead uniformity.

This assimilative process set in very early in Indian history when the Indo-Aryans came in touch, first, with the Indus Valley people and, later, with the rest of the indigenous population of India. The perfect synthesis of these two powerful cultural currents constitutes the central stream of Indian culture. That stream flowed on, receiving fresh accessions of strength through assimilation of new cultures and peoples. The river Gaṅgā is an apt symbol of Indian culture. It starts as a little holy stream in the heart of the Himalayas; it

receives the waters of many a tributary in the course of its flow, to become eventually the mighty river of joy and blessing to millions of people. The Iranians, the Greeks, the Scythians, the Arabs, the Turks, the Mongols, and, finally, the Europeans—all have contributed their quota for the enrichment of Indian culture. All the major religions of the world have also poured their ideas and visions into the stream of this culture.

THE MODERN RENAISSANCE OF INDIAN CULTURE

It is true that the process of assimilation of these varied elements is not complete; all assimilation involves the vitality of the central cultural tradition and its hospitality to the incoming cultural forces. There has been a weakening of this central cultural tradition since about A.D. 1000. This did not, however, halt the assimilation process, but only slowed it down. Today, India is experiencing a revitalization of her culture and an intensification of the assimilation process. And, under the stimulus of the modern national renaissance, whose out-

standing sponsors and leaders—Ram-mohun Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Tagore, and Gandhi—were universal and human in their outlook and sympathies, this process bids fair to become pervasive and total, so as to make India the home of a happy synthesis of all the finest cultural legacies of humanity. Describing Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as 'universe souls', Romain Rolland introduces them to his western readers as the foremost of the heroes of the modern renaissance in India:

'From the magnificent procession of spiritual heroes, whom we shall survey later, I have chosen two men who have won my regard, because with incomparable charm and power they have realized this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove, the Thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda' (*The Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 8).

THE FUTURE OF INDIAN CULTURE

This trend towards a total synthesis is based on the conviction voiced by Viveka-

nanda that Indian culture, though undoubtedly great in its own way, is partial and incomplete. This is true of all existing cultures which bear this stamp of incompleteness due to specialization. Vivekananda took Indian culture in the direction of what he had achieved in his own person, namely, an appreciation and assimilation of modern cultural values with a view to evolving it into a truly human culture. He stood at the confluence of the past and the future, and of the East and the West.

‘In the two words equilibrium and synthesis,’ says Romain Rolland, ‘Vivekananda’s constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit: the four *yogas* in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits, but he himself had been through them all, and embraced them all. As in a quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled towards Unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy’ (*Life*

of Vivekananda, Chapter IV, 'Civitas Dei—The City of Mankind', p. 310).

With an impressive and long past behind her, and with new youthfulness and dynamism acquired from her modern renaissance, India and her culture can look forward to a more glorious and fruitful future.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

'Everyone born into this world has a bent, a direction towards which he must go, through which he must live, and what is true of the individual is equally true of the race. Each race, similarly, has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Each race has to make its own result, to fulfil its own mission. Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be.

But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious. Let the Persian or the Greek, the Roman, the Arab, or the Englishman march his battalions, conquer the world, and link the different nations together, and the philosophy and spirituality of India is ever ready to flow along the new-made channels into the veins of the nations of the world. The Hindu's calm brain must pour out its own quota to give to the sum total of human progress. India's gift to the world is the light spiritual. . . . Slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of this calm, patient, all-suffering spiritual race upon the world of thought' (*Complete Works*, Vol. III, Ninth Edition, pp. 108-10).



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